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Kelsy Burke

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, kburke@unl.edu

Amy McDowell

University of Pittsburgh, adm60@pitt.edu

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Superstars and Misfits: Two Pop-trends in the Gender Culture of Contemporary Evangelicalism

Kelsy Burke and Amy McDowell¹

University of Pittsburgh

Abstract

This paper examines gender in two forms of mediated contemporary Protestant evangelicalism in the United States: a male-dominated punk network, called Misfits United, and a women's group studying Beth Moore's Bible study, It's Tough Being a Woman (ITBAW). While the appearance and performance styles of these two groups are drastically different, both support gender hierarchies in similar ways. Misfits United and Moore's ITBAW present the gender of their Christian God as flexible, even transformative, and in effect open up discursive space to conceptualize gender on non-traditional grounds. Paradoxically, however, both reinforce traditional gender roles by emphasizing what distinguishes God from His creation: the gendered constraints of human biology.

Keywords: Evangelical, gender, Christian rock, women's ministries

Introduction

In the United States, conservative Protestant evangelicals² thrive in the religious marketplace, in part, because they integrate popular culture into their religious traditions (Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Lee and Sinitiere 2009; Roof 1999; Wuthnow 1998). For instance, they are especially skilled at using entertainment media to convey their religious beliefs (Hendershot 2004; Steinberg and Kincheloe 2009). Some evangelicals use movies, music, and even live magic shows to transmit an evangelical worldview on

topics such as relationships, depression, and diet. Consequently, scholars find that it is evangelicals' capacity to stay culturally relevant that helps explain how they triumph in the religious market.

In this paper, we analyze how two forms of mediated contemporary Protestant evangelicalism present conservative religious beliefs about gender. One group is Misfits United (MU), a network of skull-and-crossbones donning Christian punks who scream rather than sing their praises. The other is Beth Moore's *It's Tough Being a Woman* (ITBAW) Bible study. Unlike the dissident tattooed youth that make up Misfits United, Moore is an evangelical superstar, who has a distinct but sophisticated Southern drawl, sun-kissed skin, and is heavily but tastefully made up. At first glance, the Misfits United and a Beth Moore Bible study are unlikely cases to be joined together for a discussion of gender and evangelicalism. Yet both are sites of gender imagination and articulation in predominately white evangelical communities that use media to organize spiritual life.

Our project is not to compare Misfits United and Moore's Bible study, but rather to present both as illuminations of how two types of mediated contemporary Protestant evangelicalism present gender. Whereas Moore's ITBAW study takes place via DVD on a large projection screen in the Orchard Valley mega church, the Misfits United conference brings together emerging church ministers and affiliate Christian hardcore bands for an annual weekend of music, movies, and workshops. We think the gender differences of ITBAW and Misfits United also make them exceptional cases for this kind of analysis. While Moore repeatedly makes reference to femininity during her all-women's Bible study, the male leaders at Misfits United seldom discuss masculinity openly. Instead, they use the aggressive qualities of hardcore punk music scenes to appeal to a predominately male audience.

Scholars of contemporary American evangelicalism say two types of Protestant evangelical communities are thriving in the twenty-first century: mega churches, or non-denominational churches whose membership exceeds 1,200; and grassroots emerging churches, characterized by small, intimate services that emphasize direct participation and the visual representation of spiritual life (Balmer 2006; Flory and Miller 2008; Lee and Sinitiere 2009). Mega and emerging churches appeal to those not interested in attending a traditional service because they offer alternative worship that can include rock music or live theatre in addition to a plethora of Christian lifestyle classes. In mega churches, there are support groups, marriage classes, and Bible studies that utilize evangelical TV talk show formats, instructional videos, and stadium screenings. In emerging

churches, there are a variety of art, music, and activities that “emerge” from and specialize in the cultures they engage. These gatherings range from skateboard ministries and tattoo parlour “Bible fight nights” to spiritually inspired art exhibitions.

In studying the alternative spiritual spaces that religious media creates, we assess how non-traditional worship spaces shape gender in evangelical communities. The gender culture of modern Protestant evangelicalism is extensively studied (Ammerman 1987; Brasher 1998; Griffith 1997; Ingersoll 2003). What is missing from this research is an interrogation of the gender messages presented by these two new forms of evangelical ministry, both of which provide mediated spiritual programs. We look at gender in the context of evangelical communities because of the moral and spiritual importance evangelicals place on traditional gender roles. Some evangelicals use religious beliefs to frame debates about gender politics in the United States—including debates over family recognition, reproductive health care, and censorship. We emphasize the cultural and discursive dimensions of gender politics among evangelicals, recognizing that how evangelicals talk about gender in mediated settings like the Misfits United conference or the Beth Moore Bible study may have some influence on how evangelicals think about gender politics in the United States.

In this paper, we show that Beth Moore and the Misfits United present an image of God that is both feminine and masculine, but both also suggest that human gender is confined within an either male or female body. Accordingly, God created men’s and women’s bodies differently so that men must learn to control their sexual urges and women must embrace their innate drive to be submissive to their husbands. We argue that in making a distinction between the essence of divine and human gender, Moore and Misfits United use secular, even feminist, language to promote traditional religious gender practices and beliefs.

Methodology

The authors collected all data for this study at public events. Data on the Beth Moore Bible study were collected by Kelsy Burke, who conducted participant observation of women’s Bible studies and other church events for eight months at a large (1,400 member) nondenominational church located in the suburbs of a mid-Atlantic city. As a participant observer of the ITBAW study (four months out of the total eight-month observation period), she completed daily homework in her member workbook and

attended weekly sessions to observe small-group discussions and watch Moore's weekly DVD lessons. In addition, Burke used the leader workbook and re-watched the DVD lessons for in-depth content analysis. Amy McDowell collected data on Misfits United, an annual subcultural ministries conference, which is held in the prayer rooms, cafeteria, and youth auditorium of a 500-seat East Coast Baptist suburban church. In addition to participant observations, she also collected brochures, pamphlets, music, and flyers provided at the conference for content analysis. It was in 2008 and 2009 that McDowell attended Misfits United, which she centralizes in this text, but she has also familiarized herself with this Christian punk network by conducting participant observations at the Cornerstone Christian rock festival, small live music shows, and affiliate churches.

Burke and McDowell's race and age similarities to the groups they observed helped them gain access to these communities. McDowell's knowledge of punk music helped her establish rapport with a music scene that can be difficult to approach and Burke's gender identity and status as a researcher was warmly received and welcomed by the leader of women's ministries at Orchard Valley. In order to ensure participant confidentiality, we use pseudonyms (Orchard Valley Church and Misfits United) to reference the groups we study.

Description of Cases

Beth Moore: It's Tough Being a Woman

Beth Moore has been an evangelical household name since the early 1990s. She is the author of dozens of best-selling evangelical books and Bible studies geared toward women, on a wide range of topics including motherhood, faith, and insecurity. Moore is a member of the First Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, and publishes her Bible studies through LifeWay Christian Resources, a Southern Baptist affiliate publisher. She has been a speaker at Focus on the Family events and hosts a weekly television show on the Christian network, Life Today. Although some conservative evangelicals oppose Moore's position in ministry (because, for instance, she preaches from the pulpit to a group of women), Moore herself is theologically conservative. She adheres to a literal interpretation of the Bible and believes in wives' submission to their husbands.³

Churches all over the country purchase Moore's Bible study kits, which include a leader workbook, a set of DVDs of one-hour lessons led by Moore,

and member workbooks, which are sold to participants. These Bible studies combine video, audio, and text to study a book, person, or theme of the Bible. The leaders of women's ministries at Orchard Valley Church chose Moore's recent study on the book of Esther, *It's Tough Being a Woman* (ITBAW), as the fall women's Bible study (Moore 2008).

The women who attend the ITBAW study at Orchard Valley include not only church members, but also friends and family of members and other women unaffiliated with the church but interested in Moore's newest study. On the evenings of the Moore study, between 60 and 80 women join together in a large room on the first floor of Orchard Valley. Those who speak during this meeting assume that all of the women in the room are saved and make references to their own personal relationships with Jesus Christ. Women participating in the ITBAW study at Orchard Valley are so familiar with Moore's work that they include in their introductions to one another whether or not they are Beth Moore novices or veterans (without prompting from the group leader). Even Burke introduces herself on the first night of the study, stating her name and, "this is my first Beth Moore." Another woman boasts that she had completed every Bible study written by Moore, and all of the women in the room cheered.

The ITBAW Bible study consists of two parts. For the first part, the room is divided into small groups to discuss the previous week's workbook "homework" which include questions and fill-in-the-blank statements that require participants to read and reflect upon the chosen Bible verse(s) of the day. These pieces intertwine Moore's personal storytelling, commentary from Biblical scholars and popular literature and movies such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and the 2006 film *Miss Potter*, as well as Moore's own retelling and interpretation of Biblical stories (Moore 2008).⁴ Small-group discussions review the answers in the workbook and prepare participants for the second half of the study. During this part of the study, all of the women turn their chairs to face Moore on a large projection screen.

Every week we spend the last hour of the Bible study watching and hearing Beth Moore speak on DVD. These segments present a scene that resembles both the real-life setting at Orchard Valley and the set of Oprah's television talk show. Beth Moore stands at the head of a sanctuary, in front of stadium-style seats filled with what appears to be close to 500 women eagerly awaiting Moore's message. The women on the screen look like the women at Orchard Valley, mostly white, modest, and middle class in appearance. They laugh when we laugh; they cheer when we cheer. In many ways, it feels as if those of us at Orchard Valley are the same as the women

on the screen, sharing similar struggles and joys and experiencing Beth Moore's teaching at the same time.

Misfits United

The Christian hardcore⁵ music featured at the Misfits United (MU) conference is a subset of a larger contemporary Christian rock music industry that emerged out of the Jesus Movement in the 1960s back when "Jesus became the rebel rather than the antidote to rebellion" (Luhr 2009, 77; see also Howard and Streck 1999; Young 2010). The Jesus Movement set out to revitalize Christianity without the assistance of the institutional church, and they believed rock 'n' roll was an important medium in the movement. However, unlike the social movements that inspired them, the Jesus Movement did not use the language of rebellion or rock 'n' roll for structural changes; rather, this group of hippy Christians put emphasis on "personal holiness" and individual transformation (Luhr 2009, 76). By the 1980s, Jesus People USA, a residential religious community in Chicago, had initiated Cornerstone, a hard rock festival of bands and spiritual speakers who continue to congregate on dusty grounds in circus tents and high-rise stages in rural Illinois.

Misfits United is a contemporary limb of the "Jesus freak" heritage that started with the Jesus Movement, complete with a heavy emphasis on changing hearts not society and traditional family values (Luhr 2009). The Christian hardcore youth at Misfits United use the "Jesus freak" label to describe themselves as outsiders to the church and secular society. Jesus freaks are theologically conservative and generally believe the Bible orders women to be subservient to men (Beaujon 2006). Yet, despite these conservative tendencies, Jesus freaks are labelled "non-traditional" simply because they mix the rock 'n' roll aesthetic with evangelical beliefs (Young 2010).

The stated mission of the Misfits United conference is to "unify Christianity's largest subcultures: the Punk, Goth, and Hardcore communities." The conference is organized by the founder of an evangelical ministry branch of Youth For Christ (YFC), which aims to "claim the scene for Christ" by befriending "fringe kids" at music shows. Since its inception in the 1940s, when staffed by the Reverend Billy Graham, YFC's "Anchored to the Rock, Geared to the Times" slogan has not changed; the rock refers to a belief in Jesus Christ and the times is the "different cultural settings" in which the affiliates of YFC engage to spread the gospel.⁶

McDowell discovered the Misfits United conference at the 2008 Cornerstone Christian rock festival in Bushnell, Illinois. It is at Cornerstone that she observed *Noble Truth*, an energetic hardcore punk band, open their set with the following prayer: "I just pray that . . . punks, Goths, hardcore kids, metal kids, would all come together to just glorify you, Father. We just pray that you be glorified and that we be humbled, Lord, and do everything to seek your face. We share and we pray, Amen." After *Noble Truth's* show, McDowell visited their merchandise table where the Misfits United conference flyer caught her eye. The flyer depicts two outstretched arms shaking hands in a cemetery of cracked crosses. The end of days is on the horizon, and it looks as though these two, the Goth with the pale skin and black nail polish, and the punk with the bright "Hope" tattoo, have united to make God's kingdom reign on earth.

The annual three-day Misfits United event is packed with hardcore music, spiritual speakers, worship services, Bible studies, and workshops all developed to inspire "growth and renewal in Christ." Session topics range from "What is Goth?" and "Running Underground Music Shows" to "Christian Community." Hardcore punk shows and Goth nights happen here too, rousing dance moves that go from head bobbing to aggressive slam dancing. Most participants are young white men with no more than three racial minorities present at any given event. They range between eighteen and thirty years of age, with the exception of a handful of baby boomers, ages forty-five to fifty-five years. The men wear faded tight-fitting jeans, converse shoes, and black t-shirts, with chain wallets and skull accessories. They have greasy hair, scraggly beards, and lots of tattoos and ear stretchers. Many, but not all, of the women in attendance at Misfits United are the wives or girlfriends of conference leaders and bands. Most of the women dress in a toned-down punk, with fewer or no tattoos and ear stretchers, and neatly primped colourful hair and make-up. A couple of these women lead or co-organize workshops, but in 2008 and 2009 the spiritual speakers, who portray themselves as the conference leaders, are exclusively white, male, and older than the bands and participants that make up the majority of Misfits United. These thirty something year old men often talk of "the scene" as though years of experience have made them acutely aware of its temptations and troubles, a lesson they integrate into the conference program.

Literature Review

Media programs and activities offered by evangelicals are decidedly gendered (Bartkowski 2001; Gallagher and Wood 2005; Heath 2003; Heller 2002; Pevey et al. 1996). Following a social constructionist perspective, we consider gender to be the socially produced categorical division between men and women. The active construction of a gendered identity requires successful context-specific performances of femininity or masculinity, which rely on idealized traits associated with women and men (Dozier 2005; Lorber 1994; Schilt and Westbrook 2009; West and Zimmerman 1987). Successful gender performances are particularly important within the context of evangelical communities, where much emphasis is placed on traditional gender roles.

Because a major tenet of the evangelical faith is that the Bible speaks directly about the nature of men and women, gender attitudes within evangelical communities are extensively studied. Research finds that, in general, evangelicals are likely to support traditional gender roles (Davis and Greenstein 2009; Gallagher and Smith 1999). Conservative evangelicals believe that God created men and women differently: men are naturally predisposed to leadership, activity, and a strong work ethic, while women are naturally nurturing, passive, and receptive. However, in order for these attitudes to be meaningful, we must consider the entire gender culture of conservative evangelicals, that includes the “theology, ideology, practices, norms, expectations, and all other dimensions of gender as they exist” (Ingersoll 2003, 16).

Sociologists of gender and evangelicalism show that for conservative evangelicals, gender norms are often unachievable in practice. Even though popular evangelical literature presents essentialist gender roles and evangelicals purport to believe in these roles, evangelical couples’ everyday experiences tend to resemble “mutual submission” in which husbands and wives share household responsibilities. While couples symbolically support traditional roles, women often work outside of the home and men help out with child care and domestic tasks (Bartkowski 2001). Feminist ideology has influenced even men and women who oppose feminist and progressive politics, creating what Judith Stacey (1990) calls a post-feminist society. Conservative evangelicals are able to call themselves anti-feminist while taking advantage of material advantages demanded by the feminist movement, such as women working outside the home in order to sustain a middle-class lifestyle.

Past scholarship reveals that evangelicals practice gender in ways that often contradict evangelical ideology. What is missing from scholars' accounts of the gender culture of evangelicalism is an interrogation of how evangelicals use the symbols and mediums of American popular culture to draw links between gender and spirituality. Our study addresses this research gap as it examines how evangelicals use secular platforms to talk about gender in two mediated environments. We find that Beth Moore and Misfits United present traditional gender roles in new packaging. They both provide discursive space to discuss gender in nontraditional ways, but they ultimately reinforce gender hierarchies within Christian relationships.

The Gendered Nature of God

"Male God imagery" is prominent among evangelicals, meaning that masculine ideals such as strength and leadership are the primary characteristics used to describe God (Pevey et al. 1996). Yet we find that Beth Moore's ITBAW study and Misfits United imagine God as a flexibly gendered being who exhibits both ideal feminine and masculine traits.

Beth Moore: It's Tough Being a Woman

In many ways, Moore's study reinforces what scholars already know about male God imagery and evangelical communities: God is reified as the ultimate patriarch. In the ITBAW study, Moore assumes a masculine God, and she describes Him as being strong and powerful. In one DVD lesson, she says that "We are God's princesses," and God is a prince and protector. God leads us and He "always has the upper hand." Moore's focus on the natural differences between men and women suggests that masculinity and femininity are mutually exclusive categories, and therefore God is ultimately masculine rather than feminine.

However, the gendered image of God presented by Moore is flexible rather than fixed. While her study explicitly assumes the presence of a masculine God, ITBAW implicitly presents an image of a God who is also feminine. The major theme of the study is that God loves women *because* we are women. There is something innate in womanhood that allows us to connect with God and with other women believers. Moore proclaims in one DVD session, "We are Man or we are Woman, we have XX or XY

[chromosomal makeups].” She repeatedly distinguishes women from men and emphasizes that men, unlike God, cannot fully understand women because of men’s own biological make-up. In a small-group discussion, one woman recalls a moment of insight after reading the week’s homework when she realizes that her husband need not (and cannot) fully understand her emotions because God understands them. Moore, perhaps unintentionally, even suggests that women can use their relationship with God to cope with their subordinate social status as women because God, in His omniscience, fully understands women and supersedes certain masculine constraints.

Moore urges women to connect with God based on their own innate feminine traits and uses traditional notions of femininity to emphasize the ways in which God fully relates to and understands women. She relies on Christ’s feminine traits of compassion and humility to counter her description of the book of Esther’s antagonist, King Xerxes, who is uncaring and aggressive. Moore describes women as being jealous and competitive by nature, and later reminds us that God, too, is jealous for our only desire to be for Jesus Christ. Moore thanks God for His help in overcoming strong (literally hormonally induced) emotions, such as sadness or worry. Moore even tells women to pray to God about being women: “about the emotion of it[. . .] about the commotion of it” because He understands it.

Moore also uses God’s transcendence of mutually exclusive gender categories to justify describing women in non-traditional ways. By asserting that it is “tough” to be a woman, Moore suggests that women are strong rather than weak; that they are brave rather than fearful. In the first DVD lesson, Moore enthusiastically tells her audience, “We’re going to be some dangerous women for God!” As the weeks continue, however, we learn that being “dangerous women for God” really means that we continue to exhibit traditionally feminine traits and fulfill traditional gender roles of being first-and-foremost a wife and a mother. While Moore’s flexible understanding of God’s gendered nature opens space for women to act out gender in non-traditional ways, she renames the status quo by insisting that being a mother and wife who is dependent upon God and her husband is “dangerous,” “tough,” and “brave” rather than “submissive,” “weak,” and “fearful.” That is, Moore uses feminist language of empowerment to reinforce women’s submission to men.

Misfits United

The Misfits United conference leaders, who are men, emulate the masculinity of the God they worship. The organizer, Luke, a bulky man with a shaved head, pencil beard, and tattoos, opens the conference with a lesson about eternal damnation. He takes a directive, stern tone to stress the strength and protective power of God and with a bleak stare Luke tells the audience that God is ready and willing to condemn sinners. Then, after he spends a moment pacing across the stage, Luke pauses to firmly say, "Hell is a real place." At the close of the sermon, Luke asks people to repent "tonight" and attempts to insert fear in the audience's hearts saying, "You never know what can happen . . . you might get in a car crash on your way home, die, and go to hell."

While the Misfits United leaders accentuate the masculine characteristics of God, God's gendered identity is rendered inconsistent by their references to His feminine qualities. It is notable that Misfits United use "God" and "Jesus" interchangeably to transmit both nurturing and aggressive images of their deity. They do not solely depict God as the tough authority figure and Jesus as the caring forgiver. Instead, in one moment we hear that God is a strict parent who punishes those who disobey. In the next, God is a nurturing parent who takes care of everyone, even the punks and freaks that the "mainstream church rejects." That is, Misfits United's flexible understanding of God renders Him an authority figure and caregiver; God implements the rules but He also looks after the rejects of society.

The feminization of God as a caretaker, communicator, and spiritual vehicle for developing relationships is evident in the Misfits United's recurring "Christian community" workshop. The session organizer, a young woman with dyed black hair and dark clothing, starts the workshop by asking "What is community?" and then answers her own question saying "God builds it." Without elaboration, a small group of about ten people start shouting "Family," "Honesty," "Sharing," and "Support." Disrupting these one-word descriptors, a young man reclining in a leather sofa asserts that the problem with the Christian concept of community is that "we want to cure rather than care for people." He advocates an inclusive Christian community that focuses on healing the "mainstream church" and culture at large, like Jesus did. In another "Community" session, participants talk about the power of healing and how the sharing of food between

Christians and non-Christians is an authentic expression of Christ's love. This form of fellowship, attendees argue, is more powerful than a church service because it is in talking with people "where they are," spiritually and physically, that the church is renewed and invigorated.

The Community sessions encourage the Misfits United to save lost souls by enacting dispositions associated with femininity such as concern and sensitivity. The organizer of the session defines the church as a body with many functions and claims the "Body is the unit—all parts are one body." Misfits United have a special function in this body; their mission is to reach those who are "like us," meaning the social outcasts. In response to her statement, one group member immediately perks up to ask, "Can you have non-Christians in your community?," that is, are non-Christians also part of the church body? A scraggly young punk guy responds that in the past he never thought he could be friends with someone "who believes in abortion, or a gay person, or a Nazi" but he is friends "with these people now." He goes on to say that he struggles with having "these kinds of friends" but concludes that "People are not projects . . . we aren't here to change people. Jesus does that. He loves people because God does that. God loves people before they change." In insisting that the Christian church has a responsibility to put love before judgment, he, like the other participants in the session, asserts that nurturance, not punishment, is the best way to win over converts.

The Gendered Nature of the Human Body

Despite the frequency with which Misfits United and Beth Moore discuss God's flexible gendered nature, our cases also spend a considerable amount of time discussing the biological make-up of gendered bodies, which are inflexible, fixed categories of either men or women. The body is implied in any discussion of gender since gender is intelligible in part through bodily actions and sensations (Connell 1995; McGuire 2007). Yet evangelicals need not necessarily discuss the body explicitly in order to discuss gendered expectations for men and women. Scholars commonly find that evangelicals reference the Bible for this purpose. Our cases, however, discuss the body explicitly and to great extent using notions of biology in addition to scripture.⁷

Beth Moore: It's Tough Being a Woman

Even though Moore credits God with creating women's gendered bodies, God's ability to transcend gender norms does not apply to men and women. Moore emphasizes that hormones (or the biological make-up of the body) determine the internal qualities of womanhood, and those qualities are fixed from the time of a woman's creation. In her first DVD lesson, she adamantly states, "At the moment of conception, the sex is determined, and at that instant, you become 100 percent female." And being 100 percent female is at the core of personal identity: in another DVD segment she stresses that "You and I are women. We are women. When Satan attacks my womanhood, he is attacking *Who I Am*."

Moore emphasizes the body literally, referencing hormones and chromosomal make-up frequently when discussing natural qualities of women. She suggests that when discussing why it's tough being a woman, we not only discuss the book of Esther, but also discuss estrogen. Citing an online survey she conducted before filming the ITBAW study, Moore says that women claim "hormones" as the number one reason why it's tough being a woman. Hormones are emotional, rather than sexual, though; Moore's definition of hormones focuses on the emotional fluxes associated with women's menstrual cycle, specifically premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Hormones produce the biological (and emotional) make-up of womanhood; the sexual make-up is not included in this discussion.

Moore suggests that innate womanhood (that God created) must battle social conventions about womanhood (that the secular world created). In one DVD session discussing the week's theme, "It's tough being a woman in a mean world," Moore emphatically tells her audience that "We live in a world that is mean to women; [. . .] a world where two 'x' chromosomes have been turned into triple 'x' DVDs." Secular society mutates God's original womanhood by emphasizing women's sexuality and physical appearance. Moore tells women to resist the urge to dress provocatively and give into secular standards of beauty (and figuratively become the star of their own XXX feature). Dressing provocatively leads to misery, fear, and sin, according to Moore. Instead, women must actively perform gender in the ways in which God demands.

Even though Moore emphasizes the innate, unchangeable aspects of womanhood, she spends much time discussing how to enact proper womanhood. For example, she tells women to "cover up" but to do so "cutely,"

so women will appeal to their husbands but not to other men. She suggests that beauty is not something someone is, but rather it is a treatment, or an action, that one does. In other words, one must actively use the external body to exhibit the womanhood that exists internally. Moore does not describe this as a paradox, but rather as the only way for Christian women to live in a secular world while displaying God's ideal notion of womanhood.

Throughout the ITBAW Bible study, Moore implies that God has created men and women differently when it comes to their innate sexual desires. She does not discuss herself or other women succumbing to sexual sin, but frequently discusses men's natural tendency to do so. Evangelical men are linked to sexual sins because of traits associated with masculinity, including a strong sexual drive. Moore uses the case of Esther to discuss men's natural sexual aggression and their inevitable tendencies to "mess up." She describes her greatest fear: that her husband would fall in love with another woman. Therefore, Moore tells her audience that married Christian women should be sexually available to their husbands. At the same time, though, she instructs them to dress "cutely" rather than "sexy." She equates sex appeal and sexy dressing with non-Christian women, who commit sin by tempting others with their provocative dress. The only time Moore discusses women's sexuality is when she focuses on the bodies of non-Christian women or when she links Christian women's sexuality to their husbands. On their own terms, there is no room for evangelical women's bodies to be sexualized. They are sites of feminine modesty and purity and are therefore only sexually desired by their husbands. In Moore's study, women learn that innate womanhood must be achieved by battling secular ideas about women and by expressing sexuality in private with their husbands.

Misfits United

"I hated God!" Several preachers at Misfits United yell this phrase when describing their relationship with God before being saved. Consequently, their "I hated God" narratives weave abomination with stories of sexual deviance. One speaker says he "hated God" back when he was only fourteen years old. During his "hormonal adolescent years," he attended a Christian Bible camp only to "flirt with girls" and found himself "daydreaming during boring youth services about the girls at camp." Another sermon leader says he "hated God," too, back when he was a young man

doing drugs, drinking, and looking at pornography. The sin of pornography, he goes on to say, made a strong connection with God impossible. In another instance, the lead singer of a popular hardcore band interrupts his set with a story about when he “hated God.” At the time, he was in high school and sleeping with a woman who was engaged to be married. As he tells the story, he weeps and talks softly about how he has since repented and received God’s forgiveness for his sexual immorality. Soon after, the drummer lightly rolls back into their “Praise Him” song, which connotes a transition from worshipping sex to worshipping God. This shift inspires the audience to dance vigorously and lift their hands to the sky.

At the conference, spiritual speakers suggest that men have a license to make mistakes because biological dispositions cause men’s strong sexual appetite, an appetite that only a relationship with God can intervene and block. One pastor’s commentary presents different variations of hegemonic masculinity (see Connell 1995; Heath 2003) as both a source of sin and of redemption. He makes reference to Christian bands that have fallen from God’s grace by “womanizing” and “whore mongering” while on the road and says that Godly men must put family first. Like this pastor, the organizer of Misfits United degrades women in order to criticize men for bad behaviour. The Christian subculture must focus on Jesus, not women, he says. Bands that “sell out” to “get worldly things” such as “drugs and hookers!” must seek God’s forgiveness. The Misfits United organizer, like the other preachers and bands at the conference, demonizes, ignores, and silences women’s sexuality.

The commentary at Misfits United suggests that men are predisposed to sexual promiscuity, but with God’s help, they can find happiness (and salvation) through lifelong monogamous heterosexual marriages. While these men blame non-Christian women for their own sexual mistakes, the male performers always include the role of their Christian wives or girlfriends in their conversion stories (see also Ammerman 1987; Brasher 1998). The stories have the same logic with slightly different details. For example, a girlfriend of a Misfits United participant may come to Christ before him and get him thinking about God. Then, a friend of this participant has a drug overdose and dies and goes to hell. Later, in the midst of his grief, God miraculously comes into his life to save him. But it is this participant’s girlfriend who “planted the seed” and got him thinking about God in the first place. Secular women are the cause of men’s corrupted relationship with God and it is Christian women who heal men’s relationships with God.

Conclusion

In this paper, we discuss popular trends in evangelical culture wherein male-directed congregations are being replaced by programs and products that teach men and women how gender defines the Christian lifestyle. We use Beth Moore's *It's Tough Being a Woman* and the Misfits United conference to show that media forums are ripe spaces for imagining and articulating gender in evangelical communities. We find that Moore and Misfits United illuminate the multiple and sometimes contradictory ways in which contemporary evangelicals discuss gender—by discussing its divine nature (or how God transcends gender categories) and by discussing its human nature (or the biological restrictions associated with gender roles). We suggest that our cases do this because they must deal with advances in secular culture of the past several decades, such as feminism and advances in science, while maintaining evangelical traditions rooted in patriarchy and traditional gender roles.

Both of our cases preserve traditional gender roles by assuming God to be a patriarch, or a masculine authority figure, but both ITBAW and Misfits United also present contradictory messages that suggest God is feminine. God transcends the mutually exclusive categories of masculinity and femininity, and this, in some ways, allows evangelical men and women to characterize gender in non-traditional ways—the women of Moore's study are tough and the men of Misfits United are sensitive. But our cases ultimately reinforce traditional roles using biology, in addition to (or sometimes instead of) the divine—for example, men are innately sexual and women are innately modest. According to the gender logic disseminated in these communities, a transcendent God is capable of intervening and reforming the gendered human body when it comes to men (because men are innately sexually aggressive). But when it comes to women, it is up to them to overcome secular pressures about womanhood in order to embody a Godly femininity (because women are innately sexually modest).

Moore and Misfits United promote stereotypes of femininity, masculinity, Christian bodies, and non-Christian bodies. The participants in Moore's study learn that internal aspects of the body (i.e., hormones and an innate womanhood) produce an external female body. Yet paradoxically, Moore spends much time discussing how to make the external female body reflect the internal qualities of womanhood. In doing so, she denies women control of their own sexual bodies by firmly situating the female body (external and internal) within the control of either a husband or the secular

world. The former is the proper location of the Christian female body, and the latter controls the bodies of non-believing women. The Misfits United, on the other hand, repeat the phrase, “I hated God,” to connote a masculine conversion story that centers on men’s innate sexual lust for women. Because women at the Misfits United do not use this language to describe their faith, we suggest that the language of “I hated God” creates a particular image of masculinity that is linked to hormonally driven aggression and lust. Misfits United, like Moore, describes Christian and non-Christian women differently. Christian women are pure and without sexual drive; whereas non-Christian women tempt men with their sexuality. Therefore, overcoming the temptation of sexual women, a common authenticating scheme in the Born Again awakening (Ammerman 1987; Balmer 2006), characterizes the Misfits United men’s conversion stories. And it is precisely these stories of biological victory that reinforce heterosexual men’s spiritual authority at Misfits United.

Moore and Misfits United’s emphasis on the human body allows them to address the influences of feminism and modern science on how contemporary society understands gender. We find that despite the nuanced ways that they both present gender, their messages ultimately suggest that traditional gender roles are imprinted in the body that Christ created. Although God may transcend gender categories, people are limited biologically. Evangelicals are therefore instructed to practice gender in ways that reinforce gender and sexual hierarchies.

Notes

1. This work is fully coauthored; author names are listed alphabetically. Direct correspondence to Kelsy Burke (kcb17@pitt.edu) or Amy McDowell (adm60@pitt.edu), Department of Sociology, Wesley W. Posvar Hall 2400, 230 South Bouquet Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.
2. We use conservative Protestant evangelical and “evangelical” as shorthand to refer to a variety of mostly white contemporary Christian faith groups that are united by a common theological core founded on repentance and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as their personal saviour (Ammerman 2005; Balmer 2006; Wilcox et al. 2006).
3. Burk and Hamilton (2007), representing the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, offer a conservative evangelical perspective on women’s involvement in evangelical ministry and show ambivalence when it comes to Moore’s role as a leader in women’s ministries. For additional reading on Moore’s theological beliefs,

especially when it comes to men's headship and women's submission within marriage, see Moore (1997).

4. In addition to references to popular literature and films, Moore heavily cites the work of Michael V. Fox, Biblical scholar and Hebrew specialist, and Karen H. Jobes, professor of New Testament Greek and Exegesis.
5. Christian hardcore is heavy, fast punk music often combined with metal music and aesthetics. Christian hardcore scenes typically overlap with Straightedge (SXE) hardcore music scenes in that they both advocate a "clean living" lifestyle that is free of drugs, alcohol, and promiscuous sex (Haenfler 2006). Although most Christian hardcore bands come out of Protestant evangelical churches or adhere to evangelical principles, they call themselves "Christian," not "evangelical." Some hardcore youth suggest that the term "evangelical" creates unnecessary divisions between Christians and point out that Catholics, especially post-Catholics, are also involved in Christian hardcore music. Scholars of religion and popular culture argue that despite the differences among Christians, many bands identify as Christian because this more basic label guarantees them a larger niche market (Steinberg and Kincheloe 2009).
6. For information about the history of Youth for Christ, visit the organization's webpage: <http://www.yfc.net/about/history/> ; for a discussion of how Youth for Christ developed, see Diamond (1989) and Pahl (2000).
7. Unlike historical characterizations about evangelicals' opposition to science, contemporary evangelicals interpret popular science in ways that support their religious beliefs. Moore's emphasis on hormones, for example, is similar to other evangelicals who, according to Kathleen Jenkins, "creatively engage" with popular science, specifically genetics (Jenkins 2007; see also DeRogatis 2009).

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